

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
Marine Corps University  
*User's Guide to Marine Corps Values*

**DEVELOPING SUBORDINATE LEADERS**

1. Introduction. "A spirit of comradeship and brotherhood in arms came into being in the training camps and on the battlefields. This spirit is too fine a thing to be allowed to die. It must be fostered and kept alive and made the moving force in all Marine Corps organizations."

Major General John A. Lejeune.

2. Overview. The purpose of this discussion is to develop subordinate leaders.

3. References. The following provide additional information on developing subordinate leaders:

FMFM 1-0, Leading Marines  
Marine Corps Manual  
Noncommissioned Officer's Handbook

4. Discussion Leader Notes

a. In the natural order of things, Marines will be promoted into ranks in which they must accept increasing amounts of responsibility. We have a duty to those Marines to prepare them for these future challenges. By doing this effectively, we also guarantee that future generations of Marines will benefit from our traditionally outstanding leadership.

b. Casualties will occur during war. When leaders become casualties, and they will, someone must be ready to step into their shoes. If that means that a lance corporal must lead a platoon, then that is what will happen. Again, it is our duty to prepare our Marines for that eventuality, for their sake and for the sake of the other Marines in the unit.

"These men are in the formative period of their lives, and officers owe it to them, to their parents, and to the nation, that when discharged from the services they should be far better men physically, mentally, morally than when they were enlisted."

General John A. Lejeune  
Marine Corps Manual

c. Basically we have a moral obligation to develop our Marines into better all around people. A big part of this process is to develop their character to enable them to lead, whether or not they continue on in the Corps.

d. Our philosophy of command stresses the need for decentralized action. This demands initiative at all levels of command, and that initiative can only come from solid leadership throughout the ranks.

e. In a decentralized system, how important is leadership throughout the ranks? Very important. A decentralized philosophy of command demands initiative and leadership among subordinate leaders. Warfare, which by its nature is filled with confusion and the fog of war, demands leaders at all levels who can think on their feet and take the initiative in unexpected situations. So this is another reason why we must take time to develop those leaders.

f. The relationship between officers and enlisted Marines should "...be consistent with traditional standards of good order and discipline and the mutual respect that has always existed between Marines of senior grade and those of lesser grade." The Marine Corps Manual talks about the "Father and Son" and "Teacher and Scholar" relationship. What is meant by these phrases?

(1) "Father and son" means that the leader must provide guidance, support, and direction to the subordinate leader. The leader must be willing to spend time with his/her Marines and be available to them. For example, a father has to decide whether or not to let his son borrow the car. He does, but only because he trusts his son. He trusts his son because over the years, his son has proven himself responsible through his actions. Further, his son understands his obligation to prove himself to his father before being trusted with a major responsibility.

(2) A father must guide and encourage his son if that son is to achieve. The father must also be willing to discipline his son when the situation warrants such action. It is the same for the leader of Marines. The teacher and scholar relationship is self-evident. We must teach our Marines what they need to know with the goal of developing them to the point where they can take what knowledge we have give them and draw upon it to learn on their own. We want the scholar to eventually surpass the teacher if possible.

g. Additional points for possible discussion.

(1) Teacher/ Scholar-two way instruction.

- (2) Looking out for Marines (pay, leave, awards).
- (3) Mission orders and then hold their feet to the fire.
- (4) All leaders should make themselves expendable.

## 5. Discussion

### a. Insist on the use of the chain of command.

(1) Hold subordinate leaders responsible for the actions of those under them.

(2) Delegate authority commensurate with responsibility.

(3) Decisions should be made and problems solved at the lowest level in the chain of command.

### b. Teach your subordinates what to do.

(1) Set standards and goals that can be met.

(2) Lofty goals and objectives have their place, but subordinate leaders need day-to-day objectives.

(3) Instruct on what you want done, trying to avoid the how.

(4) As general of the Army Omar Bradley wrote, "There is no better way to develop a person's leadership than to give him a job involving responsibility and let him work it out. We should try to avoid telling him how to do it. That principle, for example, is the basis of our whole system of combat orders. We tell the subordinate unit commander what we want him to do and leave the details to him. I think this system is largely responsible for the many fine leaders in our services today. We are constantly training and developing younger officers and teaching them to accept responsibility."

### c. Recognize achievement and accomplishment.

(1) Judicious, timely, and effective use of meritorious masts, meritorious promotions, awards, and special liberty will enhance leadership in a command.

(2) Frequent oral and written encouragement also serves to raise morale and initiative. However, do not give out awards like candy, for this tends to lessen their worth and effectiveness. Marines are not stupid, and they know who among them deserves recognition and who doesn't. When an undeserved

award is given out, it cheapens the meaning of that award for those who really deserve them and demotivates those who have worked hard and received no recognition.

d. Give those that demonstrate potential increased responsibility.

(1) Use natural leaders to their fullest extent. Outspoken individuals sometimes can be a valuable aid in influencing subordinates.

(2) Use the "hard chargers" to the maximum extent possible. This should again raise the example of the father and son, with the son being given even greater responsibility as he proved that he could handle it. Also, it is just common sense, since we must allow our Marines to crawl before they can walk.

e. Give positive and direct correction of errors in judgment and initiative.

(1) Honest mistakes can be tolerated if used as teaching points.

(2) Correction of error early in the development of subordinate leaders will enhance their growth. Do not let mistakes grow into sore points.

(3) Mistakes are to be considered essential to the learning process and thus cast in a positive light. The focus should not be on whether the leader did well or poorly, but on what progress he/she was making overall to develop as a leader. Damaging the leader's self-esteem, especially publicly, should be strictly avoided. The key here is that we don't want to totally destroy a potentially good subordinate leader for making an honest mistake -- he/she is trying to learn. By focusing on what went wrong rather than on what the leader did wrong, the lesson is learned and the subordinate retains some measure of self-confidence.

f. Encourage initiative and resourcefulness.

(1) Initiative is the stimulant to growth for any organization.

(2) Recognize a new way to accomplish a task.

(3) Resourcefulness is desirable in all leaders. A subordinate who is an initiator and resourceful is highly desired.

g. Hold subordinates responsible for their actions.

Not only are subordinate leaders responsible for their personal actions, they are also responsible for the actions of those they lead. This is sometimes a tough message to get across to subordinate leaders.

h. Instill values.

(1) Leaders must emphasize the core professional values of our leadership philosophy; i.e. loyalty to the nation and the Marine Corps, loyalty to the unit, personal responsibility, and selfless service.

i. Accept increased responsibility willingly and insist that subordinates do the same.

"Can do" is a motto that bears attention. Seeking responsibility is the mark of a leader. As leaders we must seek increased responsibility for ourselves and our subordinates.

j. Stress the fact that the leader must be approachable by subordinates in an informal but not a familiar way.

This is not an open door policy. It means a frank, open approach to problems or mistakes. A relationship must be fostered between subordinates and leaders that is based on trust and confidence, not on fear of retribution. Familiarity, favoritism, or undue friendliness are not the marks of a leader and must be avoided at all costs.

k. Ensure subordinates receive the proper feedback about their performance through timely counseling.

Subordinates will continue to make errors unless they are guided along in the right direction. Additionally, counseling lets them know that you are concerned with their development.

6. Summary. You have the responsibility to look after the training and development of your subordinate leaders. If you fail to do this, you will not only damage the effectiveness of your unit, but you will possibly negatively impact the Marines who serve under your subordinates.